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Constance Thackeray

T. C.

Verses, Wise or Otherwise.

Verses, Wise or Otherwise.

BY

ELLEN THORNEYCROFT FOWLER,

AUTHOR OF "VERSES GRAVE AND GAY."

CASSELL AND COMPANY, LIMITED.

LONDON, PARIS & MELBOURNE.

1895.

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LOAN STACK
~~440~~

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TO

THOSE PEOPLE,

BOTH REAL AND IDEAL,

WHO HAVE INSPIRED THEM

THESE VERSES

ARE DEDICATED.

773

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VERSES, WISE OR OTHERWISE.

VERSES, WISE OR OTHERWISE.

The Wisdom of Folly.

THE cynics say that every rose
Is guarded by a thorn which grows
To spoil our posies:
But I no pleasure therefore lack;
I keep my hands behind my back
When smelling roses.

'Tis proved that Sodom's apple-tarts
Have ashes as component parts
For those that steal them:
My soul no disillusion seeks;
I love my apples' rosy cheeks,
But never peel them.

Though outwardly a gloomy shroud,
The inner half of every cloud
Is bright and shining:
I therefore turn my clouds about,
And always wear them inside out
To show the lining.

Our idols' feet are made of clay;
So stony-hearted critics say
With scornful mockings:
My images are deified
Because I keep them well supplied
With shoes and stockings.

My *modus operandi* this—
To take no heed of what's amiss;
And not a bad one:
Because, as Shakspere used to say,
A merry heart goes twice the way
That tires a sad one.

A Transmigration of Souls.

It was whispered by the sages
Of the prehistoric ages,
When all telegrams and newspapers and letters were unknown,
That the heathen gods felt jealous—
So the ancient legends tell us—
When the happiness of mortals was more perfect than their own.

In the days that I have quoted
You and I, Dear, were devoted
To each other with a fervour which we never, never see
In this age of shams and shoddies ;
For our souls wore Grecian bodies,
And found life a very pleasant thing in sunny Arcady.

Then the heathen gods grew spiteful
As our lot was so delightful,
And they said, "These twain shall live again when worldliness is rife;
And when we are out of fashion
They shall nurse a hopeless passion,
And shall learn that *love* counts *nothing* in the game of human life."

But we love again to-day, Dear,
In the old ecstatic way, Dear,
Though we see each other rarely and our paths lie far apart:
Ancient gods and modern London
Have been overthrown and undone,
When they tried alike their utmost to expel you from my heart.

And my people ask politely
How a friend I know so slightly
Can be more to me than others I have liked a year or so?
But they cannot solve the mystery
Of our transmigration's history,
For they've no idea I loved you those millenniums ago.

An Illusion.

Do you know that the sight of your face,
  Though I see you each day of the seven,
Can transfigure the commonest place
  Into something that seems to be heaven?

Do you know that the sound of your voice,
  When you utter a brief salutation,
Bids the stars of the morning rejoice
  As they did at the dawn of creation?

Do you know that the clasp of your hand,
  In a purely conventional greeting,
Makes this earth a mysterious land
  Where the fairies are holding a meeting?

Do you know that the ways you pass by,
  When the stream of the traffic is flowing,
Are like ladders which lead to the sky,
  Whereon angels are coming and going?

Do you know that your *Yea* or your *Nay*
Lays its clasp on my soul like a fetter?
Whilst regarding myself I can say
That I know that I ought to know better.

Her Parting Shaft.

FAREWELL for ever, my dear Sir.
Your pride and prejudice incur
My wrath beyond all measure:
I am aweary of your ways,
So scarce and scanty is your praise,
So scathing your displeasure.

The poet's *solitude à deux*
Would prove no Heaven on earth with you,
Whose satire is unswerving;
Far better you should try your hand
In petty Purgatories planned
For folk you deem deserving.

Go, trample fools beneath your feet,
And sit upon the scorner's seat,
And sneer at those about you!
Whilst as for me?—I should prefer
Your Purgatory, my dear Sir,
To Paradise without you.

Without Understanding.

So without saying a word we've parted,
  Though that you loved me full well I knew :
Little you guess I am broken-hearted—
  Little you think that I cared for you.
Vainly I looked in your face, and vainly
  Thrilled at your touch when you clasped my hand :
I was unable to speak more plainly—
  You were unable to understand.

Why did you take all I said for certain
  When I so gleefully threw the glove ?
Couldn't you see that I made a curtain
  Out of my laughter to hide my love ?
Didn't you know that your daily greeting
  Sounded like strains from an angel band ?
Though to that measure my pulse was beating,
  You were unable to understand.

Wherefore my wonderful dream is over;
Finis is written on Fancy's scroll:
You are on desolate shores a rover—
I must in patience possess my soul.
What though my heart was a mark for Cupid—
What though our way lay through fairyland?
All availed nothing, since you—you stupid!—
You were unable to understand.

Passion and Patience.

THE wine of life tastes stale and sour,
The gilt comes off the golden year,
And shadowed is, "each shining hour,"
Because, Sweetheart, you are not here.
The stupid people come and go,
And prate of pleasures old and new;
But they offend and bore me so,
Because, Sweetheart, they are not you.

And you meanwhile accept what good
The gods provide, and leave the rest;
Nor would you alter if you could
The state of things that Fate thinks best;
For you—as happy days pass by
And bring you friendships not a few—
May meet another Me; but I
Shall never find another You.

Too Sure.

SWEETHEART, you trusted me completely—
  More than I trusted in myself:
On mere acquaintances smiled sweetly,
  But friends you left upon the shelf,
Believing they would bow before you
  However careless you might be;
And so you lost the love I bore you,
  Because you made too sure of me.

You had no thought of being cruel—
  To you I know my love was dear;
But would you keep a precious jewel
  Unwatched while thieves were prowling near?
Or would you leave a golden lily
  To grow unguarded on the lea?
If love is priceless, it was silly
  To make so very sure of me.

Now choose another friend, my sweet one,
  Among the thousands passing by:
There is no doubt but you will meet one
  More suited to your taste than I.
All vain regrets I bid you smother,
  And learn this lesson "gratis free,"
To be as careful of that other
  As you have been too sure of me.

The Planet Mars.

THERE are people living in Mars, they say,
  Enjóying the lease of a longer year
And a starrier night and a sunnier day
  And steadier climates than we have here.
Are their Winters blighted by want and woe,
  Their Summers by pestilence, plague and thunder?
Do they suffer there as we do below?
  I wonder.

Do they plant and water their rosy fields,
  And struggle with sorrow and fight with fears,
While the thorns and thistles their red earth yields
  Are choking the seed that they sowed in tears?
Do they trust in idols of stone and wood,
  And trample the meek and the lowly under?
Do they love the evil and leave the good?
  I wonder.

Or a happier world may it be than this,
  Where sin hath not entered nor death by sin ;
Which is blushing still from Creation's kiss,
  Whilst never a serpent has slidden in ?
And if we may wander among the stars
  When body and spirit are riven asunder,
Shall we live life over again in Mars ?
  I wonder.

Shall we find what here we have sought in vain—
  Fulfilling ideals where once we failed ?
With the crooked made straight and the rough made plain,
  Will difficult mountains at last be scaled ?
Shall we cleanse our ways and redeem our worth,
  Repair the old wastes and retrieve each blunder ?
Shall we meet in Mars all we missed on Earth ?
  I wonder.

A Forsaken Idol.

JACOB buried his gods at Shechem—
  Cast-off idols of stone and wood;
Well he wot they would ne'er bespeak him
  Further evil nor future good:
Nevertheless he could not treat them
  Just like pieces of wood and stone,
When he thought how he'd tried to seat them
  Up aloft on an altar-throne.

Once an idol I fondly cherished,
  Which was known by the name you bear;
But my faith in its virtues perished
  When I found it was false as fair:
Nevertheless I could not break it
  Like an image of worthless clay,
When I thought how I'd tried to make it
  All I ever could hope or pray.

In my heart—down a shady hollow
  Where the willow of weeping waves—
Hide false gods, I was wont to follow,
  Out of sight in forgotten graves.
There you lie with no name above you,
  With no epitaph false or true,
Save the fact that I used to love you
  Ere at Shechem I buried you.

A Passing Glimpse.

FOR many a frivolous, festive year
I followed the path that I felt I must:
I failed to discover the road was drear,
And rather than otherwise liked the dust.
It lay through a land that I knew of old,
Frequented by friendly, familiar folk
Who bowed before Mammon, and heaped up gold,
And lived like their neighbours, and loved their joke.

You told me to look through a fast-locked gate
Which led to a garden in fairyland,
Where roses were reigning in royal state
With never a thorn for the gatherer's hand;
Where lilies with honey-sweet dew were filled,
And love-birds were flitting from tree to tree;
Where frosts never entered nor fierce winds chilled:
But closed was that gateway to you and me.

That glimpse of the garden across the way
  Has left me henceforth for the road unfit:
The traffic rolls onward from day to day,
  And sick is my soul at the sound of it.
Oh! why did you dangle before mine eyes
  Desirable fruit that the Fates forbid
Lest we, like to gods, should grow great and wise?
  And yet on the whole I am glad you did.

Three Stages.

I BELIEVED you an angel the first time we met,
Undefiled by life's flurry and fever and fret,
So I deigned to approve you.

Then I learned you were not all my fancy had weened,
So I straightway decided you must be a fiend,
And I sought to remove you.

Now I find you are something half-way'twixt the two—
Neither angel nor fiend but just human are you,
And I know that I love you.

A Parable.

SOME folks are like a mountain pool:
Upon their surface as a rule
  Are ripples, ruffles, wrinkles;
Distorted images they show
Of everything on earth below,
  And every star that twinkles.

Some folks are like a mirror fair:
No ruffles on the surface there,
  But all in perfect order;
Their presence seems to fill a place
With light and cheerfulness and grace
  And peace within the border.

L'ENVOI.

Beneath the surface of the pool
Runs living water clear and cool,
  With endless springs behind it:
Beyond the surface of the glass
No mortals are allowed to pass,
  So hard and cold they find it.

Hearts and Roses.

I GAVE you once a rose, my friend:
  You wore it first as was your duty;
But flung it from you in the end,
  Discarding its declining beauty.
I cannot say you were to blame—
  The rose was changed past recognition:
Most people would have done the same,
  Perchance, in your position.

My friend, I gave you once a heart:
  You loved it first as is your habit;
But as its novelties depart
  With looks of cold disdain you stab it.
Yet neither here are you in fault—
  The heart you won by fond endeavour
Is now no better than a vault
  Of dreams that died for ever.

While eating bread one must espy
The side whereon is spread the butter:
If one has sucked an orange dry
One throws the remnant in the gutter:
And so when friends are out of date,
And hearts are sad and worn and jaded,
They simply earn the selfsame fate
As roses that are faded.

But yet that folks are all like you
I don't believe, and shouldn't care to:
There is a friendship that rings true
Through all the ills that flesh is heir to.
I had a friend in bygone days
Who loved me more than gain or glory—
"But that," as Rudyard Kipling says,
"Is quite another story."

A Cool Customer.

My friend, you make a rule, I see,
In passing through this valley tearful
To keep your heart completely free
From feelings fond or fierce or fearful.
You stand aloof from Fate's swift stream,
And smile at Folly's sons and daughters
With wonder that they ever dream
Of dabbling in such dangerous waters.

Pray hear a fable of a fool,
Who lit a fire, rejoicing in it,
Because he felt the day was cool
And growing cooler every minute.
But when the smoke began to rise
And flames flew high and sparks flew higher,
He said, "Perchance I was unwise
To play with such a thing as fire."

And so he blew his bonfire out,
  Extinguishing its fitful flashes ;
He flung the cinders all about,
  Then died of cold among the ashes ;
Remarking with his latest breath,
  " In living coals some danger lingers ;
So if one can but freeze to death
  One wisely never burns one's fingers."

A Subject Race.

THEY knew not whence the tyrant came,
They did not even know his name;
Yet he compelled them one and all
To bow in bondage to his thrall;
And from their lips allegiance wrung,
Although a stranger to their tongue.

Whilst he was wrapped in royal state,
Their hours of toil were long and late:
No moment could they call their own
Within the precincts of the throne;
And when they dreamed their work was o'er
He only made them slave the more.

Although the conquering king was he
Of people who had once been free,
No word of praise or promise fell
From him his subjects served so well;
And none of those who crowned him lord,
Received a shadow of reward.

Obedience to his behest
Destroyed their peace, disturbed their rest;
Yet when his drowsy eyes grew dim,
No mortal dared to waken him:
They stole about with stealthy tread—
"The baby is asleep," they said.

The Great Unfed.

(Lines written on hearing that Magistrates can get no luncheon whilst sitting on the Bench.)

A GROSS neglect doth England's honour stain:
The Magistrates who wield the legal truncheon,
Who justice execute and truth maintain,
Receive no luncheon.

The Bench, alas! doth not include the Board.
If Justice feed not those who wait upon her,
The title of J.P. will be abhorred
As empty honour.

Stung past endurance by this shame of shames,
Starved in the absence of sustaining diet,
The inner man indignantly exclaims,
"Justitia fiat!"

We are aware that Justice cannot see;
But that she cannot eat it doesn't follow:
She may be blind, but wherefore need she be
Completely hollow?

They do not wish their noble toil to cease,
They do not dream of "dolce far niente,"
These persecuted Justices of Peace
(But not of Plenty):

Envying both the satiated rich
And the poor man whose mid-day meal a crust is,
"Give us, we pray," they cry, "something to which
We may do justice!"

The Sleeping Beauty.

PART I.

A FAIRY Prince supremely brave and good,
When searching for knight-errantly adventures,
Chanced on a Sleeping Beauty in a wood,
Condemned by ancient usage's indentures
To close to politics each pretty eyelid,
Lest her sweet soul should thereby be defilèd.

The Prince at first was much perplexed and pained
At the existence of so sore a scandal:
"Woman," he cried, "in all men's hearts has reigned
And trampled them to dust beneath her sandal;
Yet where's the champion that the Fates have sent us
To give to her the Vote?—*Non est inventus!*"

But then he mused, "To win the world's applause
Men soon become hard, bellicose and spiteful;
They scratch each other with their conscience-claws,

And disagreement loud they find delightful:
Then would the preaching of this harsh evangel
Be suited to 'the ministering angel'?

"When Eve employed her influence in the State,
We did not thank her for her interference:
Boadicea was not blest by Fate
In spite of all the charms of her appearance;
While Clytemnestra, with some other ladies,
Works out her sentence, I have read, in Hades.

"Jezebel, when her temper was aflame,
Was more destructive than a host of fighters:
Queen Mary—though a most religious dame—
Was apt to use her foes as fire-lighters:
And Troy—unless historians betray us—
Owed all her woes to Mrs. Menelaus.

"Elizabeth sat firm upon her throne;
But when she found opinions did not vary
That Scotland's royal charms eclipsed her own,
She soon decapitated Cousin Mary.
Woman for public life has too much gumption,
But was expressly made for home consumption.

"For, lovely Woman, though perchance you wield
Your power capriciously in times of leisure,
And are distinguished on life's battle-field

By neither giving nor receiving pleasure;
'When pain and anguish wring' the aching forehead,
Why then, you know, you're anything but horrid!

"Woman, when sheltered from the storm and strife,
Gains more distinct advantage than she misses.
(So does the State, I think.) Upon my life,
I'd rather not awake her by my kisses!"
The Prince departed with this sentence racy,
"Dear lady!—*requiescat* still *in pace.*"

The Sleeping Beauty murmured in her dreams,
"A nice young man, and one that I could care for!
As for his arguments on social themes,
I fail to understand their why and wherefore.
His hair is curly and his arm strong-sinewed:
I wonder who he is."

(*To be continued*).

The Sleeping Beauty.

PART II.

THOUGH princes left unkissed the Beauty's brow,
The Spirit of the Age could not allow
Perfection
Like hers to be politically *nil*,
Or suffer what was termed by Stuart Mill
"Subjection."

The Spirit of the Age politely tapped
The lady's door, remarking as he rapped,
"My daughter,
Since Reason's sun has risen over all,
'Tis time for thee to hear the morning call—
Hot water!

"The night of Woman's bondage now is gone,
When work and warfare by the men were done
(And wooing):
The lark sings loud—the lily opes her cup—
None sleep save thee; so, lady fair, be up
And doing!"

At first the Beauty thought she would arise
And open her bewildered, dreamy eyes
Completely:
But then she shrank from ills she did not know,
And, clinging blindly to the *status quo*,
Said sweetly:

"Into hot water I should get no doubt
If I obeyed your call, and bring about
Confusion.
Like Dr. Watts's *Sluggard* I complain,
'Too soon you've waked me—I must sleep again!'"

(*Conclusion*).

A Leap-Year Idyll.

ONCE on a time there lived a little maiden
In that strange land which lies beneath the sun,
Whose loyal heart with love was overladen
For one

Who meant to keep unmarried till his latter day,
Whose tastes were simple and whose cares were few,
Who read his *Times*, and revelled in his *Saturday Review*.

It was the longed-for year when love-sick spinsters
Lead bachelors, who have not sought a bride,
Up middle-aisles of dim, religious minsters
With pride.

On Leap-year wooings and on Leap-year winnings
The mind of the undaunted maiden ran;
So she, determined to enjoy her innings,
Began

(Her voice, as she proceeded, growing snappier):
"Dear Sir, however happy you may be,
I'm certain you'd be infinitely happier
With me.

"A wife would share your every little trouble,
Increasing every joy your heart that fills;
She'd halve your income, and exactly double
Your bills.

"Hark how the poets Woman's praise are singing!
You doubt their words, but you will find them true
When pain and anguish undertake the wringing
Of you.

"O Man, proud Man! how sad a fate would his be
If lovely Woman from his side retired:
Pyramus, when divided from his Thisbe,
Expired:

"Jack *minus* Jill, forsooth, had fallen flatter:
Darby was nobody without his Joan:
Jack Spratt could never have cleaned out the platter
Alone:

"King Edward found his Queen's assistance handy
When poisoned arrows nearly spoiled the fun:
Griselda proved her *modus operandi*
A 1.

"To tell like stories I can gladly go on
For hours and hours with rapid tongue and glib—
Quote Enid, Portia, Juliet, and so on,
Ad lib.—

"To prove my point until at last you see it;
And you must take my word for it till then."
The hapless victim meekly sighed, "So be it,
Amen."

A Quartette of Queens.

LIKE those three goddesses who ruled the earth,
And used Olympus as their private chapel,
Who went to *Paris* to decide their *worth*
After the disagreement of the apple,
The Queens at cards began to quibble meanly,
And quarrel as to which appeared most queenly.

Clubs' sovereign Lady opened the debate—
"My rank entitles me to be your foreman;
My family has been accounted great
Since we came over with the conquering Norman:
'Twould be impossible to overrate us,
Regarding our unequalled social status."

The Queen of Diamonds said, "The love of pelf
Forms the mainspring of every human action;
And so where'er I go I find myself
A solid ten-per-centre of attraction:
I always have wherewith to gild the bolus,
And make life's stream a regular Pactolus."

Her Majesty of Spades cried, "I adore
The Tree of Knowledge, cool and green and shady:
Among its roots I delved for hidden lore
Till I became a highly cultured lady,
And learned to call the tool with which I grovel,
A prehistoric or Adamic shovel."

Hearts' Queen observed, "My fortune is my face:
I am not great at books or work or cooking:
My temper's good, my form is full of grace,
And everyone considers me nice-looking;
But not my most devoted friends would ever
Describe me as distinguished, rich or clever."

These rival spirits were so much aflame,
That to control themselves they were not able;
So, heedless of the grammar of the game,
They sprang in quick succession on the table:
Hearts' reigning beauty took the trick instanter,
And beat her royal sisters in a canter.

Whereat exclaimed the three disgusted Queens,
"In Denmark's state there's surely something rotten!
We've not the faintest notion what it means."
That Hearts were trumps they'd all of them forgotten,
And that—till men and manners strangely alter—
"Love rules court, camp, and grove." *

* See Scott (Sir Walter).

An Iconoclast.

I CARVED an idol out of wood,
  And worshipped it while it was new;
But you came by and said, "What good
  Can that unmeaning object do?"
With coolness culled from thirty winters
You broke my idol all to splinters.

I hewed an idol out of stone,
  The whitest stone I ever saw;
But by your proving it was shown
  The marble had a hidden flaw.
Regardless of my heartstrings' quivers
You smashed my idol all to shivers.

Your wisdom made me worn and old
  And sick of life beneath the sun;
Yet you passed onward, calm and cold,
  Unconscious of the harm you'd done
By your crusade so strictly truthful
Against enthusiasms youthful.

But sometime in the coming years
I hope that you may build a shrine,
And have it hurled about your ears
As you have dealt with me and mine,
And meet—when like myself deluded—
With "Mrs. Be—done—by—as—you—did."

The Mulberry-tree.

Its trunk is all wrinkled,
Its leaves are all crinkled,
Its form is no longer delightful to see;
While raindrops are flowing
And rough winds are blowing
Between the gnarled boughs of the Mulberry-tree.

Beneath its arms shady,
Full many a lady
Of wonderful beauty and noble degree
Has dreamed of her lover,
While softly above her
There rustled the leaves of the Mulberry-tree.

And heroes, whose fighting
Was all for wrong's righting,
Have heard (like the King who made Philistines flee,
When bidden to dally
In Rephaim's valley)
The battle-cry sound in the Mulberry-tree.

Now past is its glory,
Forgotten its story,
Its name in the future must Ichabod be;
Its branches are twisted,
And winds as they listed
Have long made their sport of the Mulberry-tree.

Yet none shall despise it,
For highly I prize it:
No new-fangled shrubs in their beauty for me,
But rather the ruin
Of all that once grew in
The withered old heart of the Mulberry-tree.

The Unattainable.

FOR the round and radiant moon
Once I cried,
But it happened that the boon
Was denied;
For the cruel Fates decreed
That the pain
And the anguish of my need
Should remain.

So I turned again to earth
For relief:
Even moons are hardly worth
So much grief:
And I played with common toys
In my reach,
Till I wearied of the joys
Hid in each.

A wail was heard through the length of the land,
"The first-born, alas, is dead!"
And the Second Citizen mourned for his child with
ashes upon his head;
But the First One cried, "The dumb creature died
that the plague might not fall on us:
Though Death's arm was bared, yet my son was
spared on the night of the Exodus!"

When Swallows Build.

THE wakening earth with ecstasy is thrilled,
And gladness tunes the note of every bird ;
Yet in my soul strange memories are stirred
When swallows build.

I miss those fragrant flowers the frost has killed,
Which bloomed in blushing beauty yester-year ;
And songs of bygone Springs I seem to hear
When swallows build :

For into lonely hearts there is instilled
The longing for a love as yet unknown,
But which they fondly yearn to call their own
When swallows build.

So deem me neither sullen nor self-willed
If in the Spring I sing no psalm of glee,
But hang my harp upon a willow-tree
When swallows build.

With gladness shall my Summer song be filled,
My Christmas carol and my Harvest hymn :
But let my lips be dumb, mine eyes be dim,
When swallows build.

A False God.

ONCE I made me a god with a head of wood,
And a heart of stone;
And I thought that the sum of created good
Was in him alone.

So I sharpened my wit and I strove to please
By the words I said;
But the god I had made had no room for these
In his wooden head.

Then I poured out my love on the path he trod,
As he walked apart;
But what use was mere love to a senseless god
With a stony heart?

I discovered the error of these my ways
When I learned to see:
But the god that I made in my foolish days
Had the best of me.

I have gained in my wisdom, perchance, but lost
What the world called wit;
For the god that I formed at such bitter cost
Crushed the life of it.

And no more shall I love with my heart and soul
Till I cease to live;
For the god of my worship absorbed the whole
That I had to give.

I deserve to be beaten with heavy rods,
For I might have known
That their sorrows are many who make them gods
Out of wood and stone.

An Accusation.

LISTEN, my lady, while I accuse you
(Though an impertinence on my part):
Not out of malice, but just to amuse you
When you were idle, you broke a heart.
Words that could wound were by you unspoken,
Cruelty knows not the like of you,
Yet this unfortunate heart was broken
Simply because you had nothing to do.

This is my charge—you shall hear it straightway:
You have relentlessly spoilt a life;
Driven a soul through Gehenna's gateway;
Turned living waters to wells of strife;
Brought the East winds that can blight and harden
Over the fields where the zephyrs blew;
Changed to a wilderness Eden's garden.
And your defence?—You had nothing to do.

Summer Days.

THE roses weave a fragrant wreath,
The ripening fields are tinged with gold,
The bees are humming o'er the heath,
The breeze is whispering o'er the wold;
Whilst on the stones the streamlet plays
Its sweetest tunes these Summer days.

The morning clouds are pearly grey,
The evening skies are ruby red,
And all along the flower-strewn way
Bewitching lights and shades are shed;
As seen through such a golden haze
Earth seems like Heaven on Summer days.

When whirling snows of Winter-time
Are falling on the fallow lea,
When, like a cerement, the rime
Is clothing every bush and tree;
And only noontide's struggling rays
Recall the sun of Summer days;

If thou art but beside me, Sweet,
No storm nor tempest shall I fear;
As welcome as the cloudless heat
To me will be the closing year:
And I will sing my song of praise
As clearly as on Summer days.

'Tis thou, my Dearest, who dost bring
The bliss of Summer-tide to me;
And therefore thou canst steal the sting
From Winter's coldest cruelty:
When close by mine thy footstep stays,
The years seem full of Summer days.

And when the Wintry storms and snows
Have vanished with the Summer showers,
When past are all the joys and woes
Which make this mortal life of ours,
Together may we wend our ways
To realms of endless Summer days.

My Ideal.

WHEN I met with you first in the olden days,
While life was beginning and love was new,
All the charms and the virtues most meet for praise
Seemed wrapped in one parcel and labelled *You;*
So your word was my guide and your face my chart:
You were then my Ideal, Sweetheart, Sweetheart!

When I learned that your ways were unlike to mine,
That my thoughts and your thoughts were never the same,
There were rifts in the lute, but I can't divine
If either or both of us were to blame;
Yet my love for you turned to a cruel smart:
You were not my Ideal, Sweetheart, Sweetheart!

When you went to the land where the angels dwell
And left me to linger beneath the sun,
I forgot all your faults, but remembered well
How dear you had been ere your day was done.
Of a truth it was best we were doomed to part:
You are still my Ideal, Sweetheart, Sweetheart!

In the Court of the Gentiles.

NOW it fell on a day that you opened wide
The door of your heart to me,
And I timidly ventured to peep inside
The treasures thereof to see.

But you graciously bade me to enter in
And gaze on your inmost soul,
That your knowledge might knowledge in me begin—
Your wisdom might make me whole.

And because you thus called me from want and woe
To feast on your spirit's store,
On the strength of that meat I was fain to go
For forty odd days and more.

Then it happened again that I humbly stood
In front of your heart and knocked,
For my soul was athirst to be filled with good:
Alas! but the door was locked;

And, "Shall strangers be welcome," you proudly said,
"To eat of the rich man's fare?
Is it meet that the dogs should receive the bread
Which falls to the children's share?"

Oh! the gate of your soul was your own, to do
Therewith as might please you best—
To be opened for many to enter through,
Or closed at your stern behest:

Yet I wonder you let me come in at all,
Dispelling my doubt and fear,
If the iron portcullis was bound to fall
Next time I should venture near.

Peradventure my spirit was over-bold,
Deserving a sharp retort;
But I know to my cost it is dark and cold
Out here in the Strangers' Court.

The Praise of Men.

CHILDREN in the market-place,
  Merrily I piped to you ;
  Yet the dance which was my due
Ne'er was trod with dainty pace.
Then I turned a troubled face
  And my words were faint and few ;
  Yet no pitying tears I drew,
Children in the market-place !

Children in the market-place,
  Unto me your Nay was Nay,
  Though I longed to join your play
And to feel your warm embrace.
Vainly have I run my race—
  Vainly worshipped gods of clay :
  Now, too late, I learn your way,
Children in the market-place !

Children in the market-place,
I am crying on my knees,
"That I lived for such as these
Is the depth of my disgrace.
Spare me yet a little space;
And life's wine upon the lees
Shall not be outpoured to please
Children in the market-place!"

Love's Slayer.

"DEAR lady," cried he,
"Can thy love for me
Be gone past recall like the morning dew?
Was the world so cold
That our joy untold
Lay withered and dead while it yet was new?"
With pitiful pathos she shook her head;
"True love doth not die of the cold," she said.

"Kind lady," cried he,
"Can it truly be
That love which seemed perfect hath passed away?
In affliction's night
Did it lose its light,
Which faded and fled like the dying day?"
Her eyelids were heavy with tears unshed;
"True love doth not die in the dark," she said.

"Fair lady," cried he,
"Didst thou chance to see,
When fate was unfolded before thy face,
That the dreary page
Of advancing age
Was hardly the leaf that thy love could trace?"
With sorrowful anger her brow grew red;
"True love doth not die of old age," she said.

"Sweet lady," cried he,
"Did I keep from thee
My best love for ever, and give my worst?
Didst thou hold but part
Of mine inmost heart,
Where thou wert the second and I was first?"
She lifted a face on which hope lay dead;
"'Twas selfishness slew my true love," she said.

Not Forsaken.

THE public never heard his name,
So took no notice when he died ;
His little world went on the same,
Yet paused in passing to deride
A wretch who counted not the cost,
But played the game of life—and lost.

" A luckless wight," his brothers said ;
" The foe of no one but himself ! "
His sisters half disdained the dead
Who left them neither place nor pelf.
His kinsmen, in reproachful gloom,
Inscribed their *Tekel* on his tomb.

His dearest friends exclaimed, " Poor fool !
He made a muddle of his life ;
He won no honours in its school,
He wore no laurels in its strife."
So he was cursed of all his clan,
Except of me, who loved the man.

I wonder if the world to come
  Will be as hard a world as this,
With glory for the favoured Some
  Who take the prize and taste the bliss;
But for the failing Many scorn
Almost too bitter to be borne?

If so, my soul will roam afar
  From streets of gold and streams of light,
And seek him in some distant star
  Beyond the dark abyss of night.
Though harps be dumb and crowns be dim
I care not, if I comfort him.

The Man in the Iron Mask.

YOU were left in the depths of a dungeon to languish,
With no hope to dispel the gloom ;
And we picture your features disfigured by anguish
In their terrible iron tomb ;
For your food was the bitterest bread of affliction,
And your flagon a tear-filled flask,
While your spirit was seared with Despair's super-
scription,
O Man in the Iron Mask !

Yet we mimic your fate, you mysterious traitor,
In so far as it suits our ken ;
For the image we bear of our mighty Creator
We conceal from the gaze of men.
By a visor composed of absurd affectations
We regard it our noblest task
To disguise our true selves and our best aspirations,
O Man in the Iron Mask !

But it fell on a day that by Death you were smitten,
And you flung off your fetters grim :
Then God read on your forehead what Life had there written,
For no masks will avail with Him.
And as Truth cannot fail, though men flout and forsake her,
For our guidance we fain would ask
How you felt when your face was exposed to its Maker,
O Man in the Iron Mask!

The Children of Men.

An angel, of those that excel in strength,
Looked down from above on the breadth and length
Of the ways of men, and he heard the cry
They raise from a world that is all awry ;
" O, if we were happy, or rich, or great,
We would serve God well in our high estate ;
But blank disappointment and black despair
Are burdens too heavy for us to bear ! "
And the angel exclaimed, " It is hard on these
That they cannot serve God in the way they please !
If I straightened their crooked and smoothed their
rough,
The children of men would be righteous enough."
Then he prayed, " If I might for this once aspire
To give to a creature its heart's desire,
That creature would come of its own accord
With joy and thanksgiving to serve the Lord ! "
His petition was borne up the Altar-stairs
(As is always the way with unselfish prayers),

And permission was granted to prove the worth
Undeveloped as yet in the sons of earth.
In a hopeful transport the angel flew
Down the pathless waste of ethereal blue,
Till he stood by the side of a toil-worn boy,
Whose soul was an-hungered for human joy.
"If only his heart could be gay and glad,"
Quoth the seraph, "it all would be well with the lad;
But the iron footsteps of want and woe
Have trampled upon him and crushed him so,
That the visions perceived by his inward sight
Are doomed to be dead ere they come to the light."
So the messenger opened the tear-filled eyes
To the beauty of life; and in sweet surprise
The poet gave voice to his fondest dreams,
And chanted his pæans by Babylon's streams.
And he piped and sang with such wonderful grace
To the children who played in the market-place,
That their hearts grew tender, their eyes grew dim,
And the whole of the world went after him.
But the poet's soul was so finely made
That it languished in sunshine and longed for shade:
In the pitiless glare of the garish day
It shrank and shrivelled and faded away.
So the poet bartered his soul for fame,
And the round earth rang with the sound of his name;
But he learnt too late, when he counted the cost,
That the world was gained and his soul was lost.

Then the angel noticed a starving man
Who pondered and prayed o'er a perfect plan
For helping his fellows, but always failed
Because of the outlay his schemes entailed.
And the angel cried, " It is sad indeed
His designs should be stopped by the stress of his need!
With wealth to help him and patience to wait,
This man and his money might conquer Fate."
Then the man, who had once been a failure, rose
To heights unimagined by friends or foes;
And waited and worked with his might and main,
Till he garnered a harvest of golden grain.
And the seraph smiled, " He will quickly fulfil
His hopes of assuaging all human ill;
And will make, by the means he can now employ,
The widow and orphan to sing for joy."
But the man, who had grown what the world calls rich,
Despised the old days when he lay in the ditch
Devising a plan for the good of his kind:
Such follies were left with his rags behind.
So he hoarded his money, and quite forgot
The dreams that he dreamed when he had it not.
A pauper, he argued, perchance might love
To lay up for pastime a treasure above;
But the wealthy had plenty to do, for sure,
Without wasting their substance on God and the poor.
Then the angel took heed to a woman's cry;
" Give me love in my life, or alas! I die:

For in spite of my beauty and rank and wit,
I grow selfish and hard for the lack of it."
So the seraph put into her hands a heart
Wherein none other woman had lot or part—
The heart of a man to be all her own,
To melt into softness or freeze into stone,
And the woman—being given a thing to use,
The anguish whereof had the power to amuse—
Began pricking her plaything and probing its pain,
Till it broke in her clutch beyond mending again.
Then she wondered whatever the harm could be,
Or who had the right to reprove her, if she
Into dust and destruction disdainfully trod
The heart of a man in the image of God.
But she sorrowed a season (as women will
When their empty existence seems hard to fill),
And prayed to be given, for pity's sake,
A similar beautiful toy to break;
For the days were long and the hours like lead
Without something to play with, the woman said.

The angel of light, who excelled in strength,
Looked down in dismay on the breadth and length
Of the ways of men; and he sadly sighed,
"A failure indeed was the course I tried!
Not glorious summers nor cloudless morns
Can grow figs on thistles or grapes on thorns:
'Tis not talents withheld from his lifetime's plan
But the thoughts of his heart that defile a man.

The mean and the selfish would prove the same
Under blessing or ban; but they lay the blame
On their lowly position or lack of parts,
And not where 'tis due, on the sin of their hearts."
Then he wept as he whispered, "If this be so,
And the heart of the citadel hold the foe—
If the cleanness of cup and of platter hide
The loathsome corruption that lurks inside—
If the roots of the tree are but rottenness—then
What help can be found for the children of men?"
And from out of the silence an answer came,
"All things can be done through the might of My Name!
The hills shall be moved, and the seas made dry,
And the camel shall pass through the needle's eye;
For the plans untried and the paths untrod
By saints and by angels are known to God."

Pictures and Painters.

A PAINTER, standing on a scaffold high,
Stepped back to wonder how a passing stranger
Would scan his art: a workman, who stood by
And saw his danger,

Bedaubed the finished fresco. With a start
The artist forward rushed in consternation;
And thus the spoiling of his work of art
Was his salvation.

Oh! ye, who pleasant pictures love to paint—
Then find your day-dreams doomed to disappointment—
Take for the soothing of your sad complaint
This healing ointment:

That Love withholds the triumph of your toils,
Bids Fancy's frescoes fainter fade and fainter,
And with a gracious Hand the picture spoils
To save the painter.

A Wish.

WHEN the world to thee is new,
When its dazzling dreams deceive thee,
Ere they pass like morning dew—
Faith retrieve thee!

When the glory fades away,
When of light the clouds bereave thee,
When the shadows mar the day—
Hope relieve thee!

When despair's destroying breath
Comes at eventide to grieve thee
With the bitterness of death—
Love reprieve thee!

When the bells at Curfew toll,
When the lingering sunbeams leave thee,
When the night o'erwhelms thy soul—
God receive thee!

They Two.

LONG is the way and lonely the road,
Hard is my burden, heavy my load.
Let not thine heart be hurt by my moan—
Leave me to walk in sorrow alone.

Where thou goest I will go,
Though the way be white with snow.
Lies thy path by sorrow's tide?
I will never leave thy side:
Leads it through a weary land?
I will never loose thine hand:
Through the wilderness of woe,
Where thou goest I will go.

Done is my day and dark is my night;
Not in my evening shall there be light.
Youth and its pleasures still are thine own—
Leave me to live in sorrow alone.

Where thou dwellest I will dwell,
Be it ill with thee or well.
Hast thou learned life's saddest truth?
I will cheer thee with my youth:
Hast thou drained the cup of tears?
I will bless thy latter years:
Is thine house a prison cell?
Where thou dwellest I will dwell.

Cold is the valley which I must tread;
Clouds and thick darkness close o'er my head.
Let me in silence face the unknown—
Leave me to die in sorrow alone.

Where thou diest I will die,
And my love shall death defy:
Waters cannot quench its flame,
Floods will leave it still the same.
Nothing that can ever be
Shall dissever thee and me.
Where thou livest there live I—
Where thou diest I will die.

A Song of Loves.

THROUGH branches of their leaves bereft
The sunlight glitters golden:
The moss with velvet clothes each cleft
In ruins grim and olden:
On falling towers the ivy strong
All signs of wreck effaces:
The streamlet sings its sweetest song
Across the stony places:

When moonless is the wintry sky
Then brightest is the starlight:
Beyond the breakers fierce and high
We see the beacon's far light:
The snowdrop rings its silver bell
When snowdrifts shroud the meadows:
The winds their sacred secrets tell
Behind the evening shadows.

And so, Sweetheart, when thou art old
  And sad and worn and weary,
When all the world is growing cold,
  And all the land looks dreary,
My heart will follow then the lead
  Of star and moss and river,
And love thee best in greatest need
  For ever and for ever.

Granny's Good-night.

DARLING, my daytime has ended its story,
Shadows of evening fall dark on my brow ;
Bright was the flush of its morningtide glory,
Sweet is the peace that is closing it now.
Still the lark's hymn to the sunrise thou hearest,
Still thou canst brush the fresh dew from the lawn :
Which dost thou think is the happier, Dearest,
I in the sunset or thou in the dawn ?

Darling, I look for a fairer to-morrow,
So do not pity but bid me Good-night :
Thou hast to walk through the valley of sorrow,
I have to soar to the City of light.
When thou art drinking the cup that thou fearest,
When I have seen the dark curtain withdrawn,
Which dost thou think will be happier, Dearest,
Thou in the sunset or I in the dawn ?

A Weaving Song.

THE weaver weaves with many a colour,
And some are dark and some are gay ;
But while the seamy side grows duller
The pattern brightens day by day.
We learn, as we perceive him taking
The different threads diversely dyed,
Designs the darkest in the making
Are brightest on the other side.

The web of life with threads is furnished
Which trace a picture in the loom ;
And some like gold are brightly burnished,
And some are deeply tinged with gloom.
Through chance and change we pass believing
That, whatsoever ills betide,
The pattern darkest in the weaving
Is brightest on the Other Side.

Portrait of a Lady.

MUST I paint a perfect woman? More than rubies is her worth:
Good she doeth, and not evil, all her days upon the earth:
Wool and flax she gladly seeketh, and she worketh with her hands:
Like the merchants' ships she bringeth dainty food from distant lands:
Fields she buyeth, vineyards planteth: in her strength doth she delight:
Darkness she illumines, for her candle goes not out by night:
Hers the spindle, hers the distaff—she the helper of the poor,
For the hungry and the needy go not empty from her door.
All her household, clothed with scarlet, Winter's snowstorms cannot fear:
She herself in silk and purple like an empress doth appear.

She is dearer to her husband than the mighty conqueror's spoil:
Linen fine and white she maketh, and the merchants prize her toil:
Strength and honour are her clothing, and her heart may well rejoice:
All her words are full of wisdom—kindness modulates her voice:
Ably doth she rule her household: idleness she ne'er displays:
And her children call her blessed, while her husband sings her praise.
He is known among the elders sitting in the judgment-hall.
She is famed among the daughters as the one excelling all.
Beauty's vain, and favour's fleeting; virtue only is divine.
Here's the picture!—But the Artist had a wiser head than mine.

Saint John Baptist's Day.

GRIM sorrow kept court with the mighty,
Grave sickness held sway o'er the poor,
And even the fearless and flighty
Prayed Death to pass over their door.
Ye Sickness and Sorrow, who sent ye
To lie like a blight on the land?
'Twas the voice of one crying, "Repent ye:
The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

The pealing and pitiless thunder
Awakened the hills with its sound;
The mountains were riven asunder,
The lightning ran over the ground.
Ye Lightning and Tempest, why rent ye
The rocks which are strewn on the strand?
'Twas the voice of one crying, "Repent ye;
The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

A tumult swept over the nations,
With strange, irresistible force;
The earth to its very foundations
Was shaken and out of its course.
Ye Kindreds and People, why went ye
Against the established command?
'Twas the voice of one crying, "Repent ye:
The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

A carol was sung by an angel
Long ages and ages ago;
A chorus took up the evangel
To comfort the world and its woe.
Ye Legions of Angels, what meant ye
By words that for ever shall stand?
'Twas the voice of one crying, "Repent ye:
The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!"

Two angels stood watching at Eden's gate;
And one of them had but returned of late
From an unsuccessful excursion;
"This portal I never could see," he sighed,
"Though seeking it always on every side;
So, my friend, let me hear your version."

The other said smiling, "'Twas pointed out
By one of the people who stood about;
But you turned with disdain past measure,
And proudly made answer, 'That tempts me not:
Deliver my soul from so dull a lot,
With such commonplace pain and pleasure!'"

An Epic of Staffordshire.

THE invading Danish foe near a thousand years ago
Travelled hither from the strand:
And it fell upon a day that his armies came this way
To our pleasant Mercian land.

They had wandered from the coast with their savage pirate host,
Leaving ruin in their track;
And all bloodstained was the sod in the footsteps they had trod,
And the turf was burnt and black.

Ethelflaed, the Mercian Queen, brought an army on the scene
To defend her native plain;
While King Edward, named the Elder, with his English hosts upheld her
In her fight against the Dane.

On the Danish foemen came, bringing poverty and shame
And destruction in their path;
And each honest-hearted Saxon by his beard so fair and flaxen
Swore to slay them in his wrath.

So the Saxons came to meet them and right royally to greet them
As they hurried on apace:
At Theotenhall* they found them with their Swedish hordes around them,
And defied them face to face.

They defied them face to face in that fearful trysting place,
And they fought them hand to hand;
While the Saxon Edward quoth, "I have sworn a mighty oath
To deliver this my land!"

Swift as thought the arrows flashed, sure as death the axes crashed,
Straight and sharp the spears were thrust;
As the maddened chargers neighed, and the clashing armies swayed
To and fro amid the dust.

* Tettenhall.

And the morning sun shone white on the glory of the fight
When the battle was begun:
And the evening sun shone red on the faces of the dead
When the dreadful day was done:

For the air was dark with slaughter, and the life-blood ran like water
As the Danes were brought to bay;
And they changed that sunlit meadow to a valley of the shadow
With the fury of their fray.

And the fight was grim and great, and the hour was dark and late,
Ere the day was won and lost;
But the Saxons gained the battle, and above the deafening rattle
Were proclaimed the conquering host.

They pursued the vanquished Danes o'er the ravaged Mercian plains
During forty days and more;
Till the foe was forced to flee to the countries near the sea,
And the lands beside the shore.

And the slain were gently laid in the oak-trees' peaceful shade
To their long, unbroken rest:
Friend and foe they sleep together, through serene and stormy weather,
On the green earth's quiet breast.

They had sworn with latest breath they would struggle to the death
Or their foes should be their slaves:
Now they lie with upturned faces, and no curses stir the daisies
That are growing on their graves.

As they slumber they may dream that things are not what they seem
On this little earth of ours,
For life's problems are made plain to the weary who have lain
Fast asleep beneath the flowers.

And perchance they understand in that silent shadow-land,
As they never did before,
That renown was but a bubble and success but toil and trouble
In the fighting days of yore.

As in manhood's golden day we look back on childish play
With a half disdainful smile,
So these wiser spirits wonder that they rent the world asunder,
And believed it worth their while.

Once again it came to pass that the Danes returned, alas!
To the sunny Mercian land;
And their track with blood was red, and their path was strewn with dead,
As they journeyed from the strand.

Then the Saxons met the Danes in the pleasant Mercian plains,
And they swore the Danes should yield;
So they smote them hip and thigh till they made them fall or fly
At the fight of Wodensfield.*

And the sunlight gleamed like gold on the armour of the bold
At the dawning of the day;
And the night-clouds hung like lead o'er the armies of the dead
At the ending of the fray:

* Wednesfield.

For the Saxons showed no quarter, and the air was
dark with slaughter,
And the fight was grim and great;
And three Kings to death were done ere the setting
of the sun
On that fearful field of fate.

Then the English conquerors hied to Winehalla* in
the pride
Of the victory they had won;
Where they feasted late and long as with revelry and
song
They proclaimed what they had done.

All their poets told the story of the hard-won Saxon
glory,
And the conquest of the foe;
While the weary warriors rested and the sweets of
triumph tested,
Near a thousand years ago.

There is little difference now 'twixt the laurel-circled
brow
And the fallen in the fight:
'Tis among the things of old, like the tales that have
been told
Or the watches of the night.

* Willenhall.

For the victors from their gladness and the vanquished
from their madness
Were alike compelled to cease,
When Death called them to their reckoning, and, his
ghostly finger beckoning,
Bade them pass away in peace.

They were mighty men and brave, and they earned a
soldier's grave
Having nobly served their day;
Yet each servant meek and lowly in the kingdom of
the holy
Shall be greater far than they:

For the man that takes a city, undeterred by pain
and pity,
Like a lion's whelp may be;
But the man that rules his spirit shall be held of
higher merit
And of truer worth than he.

Now their rage and hate are over as they lie beneath
the clover,
And they fret and fume no more:
Danish sailors, Saxon sages, in the silence of the ages
Never hear the sound of war.

For their rest is long and sweet, and they feel nor cold nor heat,
But are calm and unafraid;
While the daffodilly waves o'er the old, forgotten graves,
Where they slumber in the shade.

There they patiently must lie while the sunny days pass by,
And the stars their vigils keep,
Till the angel-sounded warning of the Resurrection-morning
Shall awake them out of sleep.

Still their spirits haunt the shadows of the oak-trees in the meadows
Where their knell the bluebell tolls:
And we humbly pray that Heaven, Whereby sinners are forgiven,
May have mercy on their souls!

SONNETS.

SONNETS.

Without.

OUTSIDE thy heart there is a garden plot
  Where thunders never blare nor tempests blow—
  Where I may wander idly to and fro,
Secure and sheltered in that stormless spot.
Within thy heart are battles fierce and hot,
  And founts of bitterness and floods of woe;
  But there thou sternly bidst me ne'er to go,
Nor give a thought to griefs that touch me not.
Whilst I? I loathe my pleasant, peaceful place;
  And vainly strive the iron gates to burst,
    Which screen from me thy secret strifes and scars:
Chilled by the coldness of thy courtly grace,
  Shut out alike from both thy best and worst,
    I break my bleeding heart against the bars.

Ways of Pleasantness.

THOU sittest in my spirit's banquet-hall
And takest freely of my corn and wine ;
For pleasant ways and paths of peace are thine,
While joy and gladness follow at thy call.
Thou dost not penetrate my prison wall,
Where hopes condemned to death in darkness pine ;
Nor dost thou bow before mine inmost shrine,
Which sanctifies the wormwood and the gall.
Thou hast no fellowship with them that mourn ;
So thou wilt leave it to some stranger-hand
To sound my depths and scale my heights with me :
And someday, in the comfort which is born
Of souls that throughly know and understand,
I shall forget thy thoughtless ways—and thee.

A Closed Door.

ONE day it happened that I opened wide
The gate which guards the inmost heart of me;
And showed my spirit's treasure-house to thee,
And prayed thee in its precincts to abide.
Whereto thy much encumbered soul replied,
"Until a more convenient time let be!"
Then shut the portal somewhat hastily:
Thou hadst so many things to do beside.
But leisure seasons find thee free to fling
Thy cares aside, and lazily demand
An easy entrance through the long-locked door.
Fool, not to know it opened with a spring,
Which snapt and broke beneath thy clumsy hand;
And now, alas, is closed for evermore!

Incognita.

SINCE I have found some favour in thine eyes
It matters nothing what the others say:
If thou art pleased to praise me, who are they
That should presume to flatter or despise?
As some proud monarch dons a plain disguise
To hide the princely state of his array,
Then scorns the scorn he meets upon his way,
Full conscious of the rank that underlies;
So I go forward with a fine disdain
Among my fellows, taking little heed
Of what their comments on my life may be:
Apart from these I hold my right to reign,
And count myself a very queen indeed
Because I know thou thinkest well of me.

My Complement.

DOST thou know, Dearest, that the Summer sun
When thou art gone is robbed of half its gold,
While Spring becomes a tale too often told,
And Youth a cheerless game for only one?
Yet when life's Winter-solstice has begun
I shall not quail before its frost and cold,
Nor tremble at the thought of growing old,
If thou art near me ere my day is done.
And even in that better, brighter place,
Where angels in triumphant chorus sing
Ascending the eternal Altar-stairs,
My soul will seek thee through the fields of space,
Nor deem the seraphs' song a perfect thing
Until I hear thy voice attuned to theirs.

An Awakening.

I LOOKED at life with all-unseeing eyes,
Unable to discern the deeper thing
Or dive below the surface to the spring,
Until thou camest as a glad surprise.
And now to me the smallest bird that flies
Twitters a song which seraphim might sing;
While roadside flowers a sacred message bring,
And teach those truths that make the angels wise.
I cannot tell thee how thy passing touch
Had power the underlying thought to show
Till all the world was changed because of thee:
Nor do I care to measure overmuch
The why and wherefore: this one thing I know,
That I, who once was blind, now clearly see.

The Password.

I DREAMED I stood before a fast-locked door
  Which nought could open save a magic word ;
  Yet I demanded entrance undeterred,
Like him who murmured *Sesame* of yore.
The grim-eyed porter cried, "Nor less nor more
  Than one word only, whence may be inferred
  The sweetest music ear hath ever heard—
The richest blessing life may have in store :
One word wherein lies hidden all the bliss
  Thou canst conceive or crave beneath the sun,
    Dearer than wealth and fairer far than fame.
Fool, wilt thou find one word expressing this ?"
  Whereat I smiling said, "The thing is done !"
    Then softly whispered in his ear—thy name.

"To His Mistress' Eyebrow."

FAIR brow, that curvest like a stringed bow,
  Whilst from my lady's laughter-loving eye
  The fatal darts of Cupid forward fly
To work wild havoc in this world of woe:
The beauty of thine arch but serves to show
  What proud contempt she pours on passers-by,
  Whose poorer points she plainly can descry;
But lets their nobler ones unnoticed go.
Then, prythee, drop one tickling little hair
  Athwart the orb, which is so fain to note
    My faults, and on my foolishness to shine:
That she, who sits upon the scorner's chair,
  May stop to clear her eyeball of a mote,
    And so learn pity for the beam in mine.

A Name.

I CARVED thy name, my friend, upon a tree—
  An old oak tree o'ershadowing us twain,
  As we were wandering down a grassy lane
One day when thou wert all the world to me.
And now once more the ancient oak I see ;
  But when I seek the carven sign again
  I only find a scar against the grain
Where that dear word of old was wont to be.
So on my heart I carved thy name of yore,
  Before I learned how false thy friendships are,
    Or dreamed that thou wert less sincere than I :
Now on my heart I find thy name no more,
  But where 'twas wont to be a cruel scar—
    A scar that I shall carry till I die.

On a Picture of the Grand Canal, Venice.

THE joy of a Venetian holiday
Glows on the canvas like a gleam of Spring:
Each princely palace seems a perfect thing
Enshrining only what is glad and gay.
'Tis Venice in her festival array;
And nothing in the picture serves to bring
Suggestions of the shade her prisons fling
Where ducal halls to dungeons pave the way.
So, likewise, would I let no prying eyes
Pierce my heart's palaces of ivory,
And on the secrets of its prison gaze.
The haunting shadows of its Bridge of Sighs
Are best forgotten: therefore think of me
As I appear on happy holidays.

"When the World was Young."

(On a Picture by E. J. Poynter, Esq., R.A.)

TWO girls in robes of amethystine hue
  Play on the pavement with the knuckle-bones;
  A third sleeps sweetly on the carven stones
Against the mountains' everlasting blue:
A bath as clear and cool as morning dew
  The faintly-tinted marble softly tones.
  Youth, Dawn, and Spring were seated on their thrones
And reigned triumphant when the world was new.
Our jaded eyes are rested by the peace
  Which fills the court; and, envying, gaze across
    The shadow that the centuries have flung,
At that fair time ere gladness had to cease
  To make more room for pain and toil and loss—
    That happy morning when the world was young.

Anticipations.

I SAID, "My pathway through a garden lies,
Where pleasant fruits abound and spices rare;
Where pilgrims feed among the lilies fair,
And palm-trees flourish under sunny skies."
I sighed, "A desert spreads before mine eyes—
A land of desolation and despair;
Where deadly dragons darken all the air
With shadows of the doom that never dies."
And lo! the garden, that so perfect seemed,
Proved but a painted paradise of fools
Where foulest worm in fairest fruit was found:
The desert, that so dreadful I had deemed,
Bloomed like a Summer rose; rain filled the pools,
And water-springs refreshed the thirsty ground.

Dreams.

I DREAMED I dwelt with gaiety and glee
In airy castles fashioned for delight;
Where song and beauty charmed my sense and sight,
And love pourtrayed how perfect life could be.
I dreamed I drifted on a shoreless sea
Beneath the shadows of a starless night,
To watery wastes where waves displayed their might,
And yawning whirlpools gaped their mouths on me.
But when the daylight dawned it mattered not
If gates of ivory or gates of horn
Had made me sad or merry whilst I slept:
So when Life's present dream is all forgot
And we have wakened to a fairer morn,
'Twill matter little if we laughed or wept.

Snowdrops.

RING, little snowdrops, ring across the snow
  Your silver bells, and peal your silent chime,
  And bring the promise of a brighter time
When birds again shall sing and brooks shall flow.
Ye only, among flowers, are fain to grow
  Fast bound in frozen fetters of the rime ;
  And spite of wind-swept clouds and wintry clime
Ye come to cheer us in our want and woe.
As ye give gladness in our time of gloom,
  Shall we recall the debt we owe to you
    In happier days, and mourn you truly then ?
Nay : when the roses and the lilies bloom
  We shall forget that snowdrops ever grew.
    Such is the wisdom of the sons of men.

Daffodils.

AGAIN ye come, ye golden daffodils,
Each robed in kirtle green and yellow gown,
To bring across the turmoil of the town
A message whispered on the distant hills.
Ye make us homesick, all against our wills,
For shady meadow and for sunlit down;
And tell us how the Spring in golden crown
The abdicated throne of Winter fills.
Our souls were happy in the din and dust,
And had no time to pine for better things
Or change this lower joy for higher pain;
Until from memory you wiped the rust,
And brought back ghosts of dear, departed Springs,
And made us little children once again.

The Waking of Spring.

THE weary earth in Winter's prison lay
Till smiling Spring unlocked the iron gate;
And then the earth arose in royal state,
To find dark night exchanged for dazzling day.
Now hath she morning light for shadows grey,
Fresh joy for faded sorrow, love for hate;
For at the touch of Spring the heavy weight
Of Winter's chains and fetters fell away.
The bright-eyed Spring came like the fairy prince
Who roused the sleeping beauty of the wood,
And called her to a life of bridal bliss:
Earth hath been wrapped in slumber ever since
White-bearded Winter at her gateway stood;
But now the Spring hath waked her with a kiss.

On the Shore.

A BROKEN boat is lying on the shore,
The butt of breakers in their ebb and flow,
Telling meanwhile a bitter tale of woe
Of those whose travels are for ever o'er.
We know but little of the freight she bore;
But from her fashion and her form we know
She came from Norway many moons ago,
But shall return to Norway nevermore.
Ye hardy Norsemen, who were lost at sea
When sailing towards East Anglia, none can tell
The wherefore of your voyage to our strand,
Nor what to you its promised end might be:
Yet who shall dare deny it ended well?
Ye found not *Angle-land* but *Angel-land.*

The Breton Fishermen's Prayer.

"DEAR Lord, Thy sea is great—our boats are small!"
So cry the fishers of the Northern sea
When God's high wind ariseth stormily,
Uplifting them before a sudden fall.
Thus in distress we also ofttimes call
When blindly beaten to and fro are we,
Far from the haven where we fain would be,
While wind-swept seas our melting hearts appal.
And when for us the waves thereof are still,
And we would gladly help those storm-tossed souls
Who yet are struggling 'neath the tempest's weight;
Feeling the frailty of all human skill,
We humbly whisper whilst the thunder rolls,
"Dear Lord, our boats are small—Thy sea is great!"

The Commonplace.

"PRESERVE me from the commonplace!" I cried,
"Nor let me walk the vulgar people's way:
I long to tread a loftier path than they
Who eat and drink, and think of naught beside."
I climbed to heights which far ahead I spied,
Nor would upon the sordid level stay:
I scorned the valley where the shadows lay,
And sought the peaks by sunlight glorified.
But looking back upon the road I trod,
I find it wound among the lives of men
Who called to me for succour, but in vain.
And now, before I see the Face of God,
I fain would help whom I neglected then:
But I can never pass that way again.

The Best Till Last.

"FILL up the pots with water to the brim;
And, having fully filled them, straightway pour!"
They did as He commanded them, and bore
To one that gave the feast; who touched the rim,
Then cried, "Most men, when lights are burning dim
And all the glory of the feast is o'er,
Stop the good wine and bring a poorer store:
But of a truth it is not so with Him."
Life likewise giveth all her good wine first:
Youth, Pleasure, Love before the guests are laid;
Then, when the festival is well-nigh past
And men have drunk the best, they drain the worst
And disappointed die; but He, Who made
The water wine, will keep His best till last.

A New Heaven and a New Earth.

LORD, Thou hast promised us a prize untold
If we Thy precepts to the end obey,
When angel hosts shall guard us on our way,
And guide through gates of pearl and streets of gold.
Let not my prayer be counted overbold
If I, in place of jasper bulwarks, pray
For pleasant pastures where the children play;
And change Thy cherubim for friends of old.
Upon Thy saints Thy heavenly joys bestow;
But give me back the country of my birth,
Delivered from the Serpent's deadly stings.
Lord, Thy new heaven I gladly will forego,
If I may find a home on that new earth
Furnished by Thee with dear, familiar things!

Figures of the True.

NOW Jacob took his gods of wood and stone
And buried them at Shechem, so we read;
Then journeyed onward, as the Lord decreed,
To Bethel, to erect one Shrine alone.
We likewise, travelling by a way unknown
To reach the great High-Altar, oft have need
To re-enact the patriarchal deed,
And put away the forms we have outgrown.
Yet Israel did not burn his cast-off gods,
Nor break them up, but laid them in the mould
Beneath an oak-tree by the way he came:
So may we leave in consecrated sods
The images that taught our souls of old,
Nor deem the Shechem in our hearts a shame.

The Evening and the Morning.

SAY not that darkness is the doom of light,
That every sun must sink in night's abyss,
While every golden day declines to this,
To die and pass at evening out of sight.
Say rather that the morning ends the night,
That death must die beneath the dayspring's kiss—
Whilst dawn the powers of darkness shall dismiss,
And put their dusky armaments to flight.
Man measures life in this wise; first the morn,
And secondly the noontide's perfect prime,
And lastly night when all things fade away:
But God, ere yet the sons of men were born,
Showed forth a better way of marking time—
"The evening and the morning were the day."

The Dead and the Living.

"SHALL the dead praise Thee?" was the Psalmist's cry:
"Shall all Thy wonders in the grave be shown?
Or can Thy lovingkindness be made known
In that forgetful land where shadows lie?"
But he, who saw descending from the sky
The holy City like a jasper stone,
Told how the elders round the emerald Throne
Chanted in heaven their glorious psalmody.
"To God be blessing, honour, power and might
For ever!" sang a countless, white-robed throng:
And only they, who suffered death's eclipse
And passed through darkness into dazzling light
Could learn that new and everlasting song.
So spake the Seer of the Apocalypse.

Means and End.

THE drops of water which have turned the wheel
Will ne'er come back to turn the wheel again :
The blossoms which have shed their rosy rain
Will nevermore the Spring's sweet promise seal.
Yet still the miller slowly grinds to meal
His goodly stores of golden-tinted grain ;
And still the Spring returns to hill and plain,
And treads the dust to flowers beneath her heel.
Fear ye not, therefore, lest the cause ye love
Should languish, when your tender, toil-worn hands
Are crossed in peace beneath the daisied sod !
The Means wax old and perishable prove—
The End endures eternally, and stands
Above the ages, face to face with God.

Stream and Lake.

A STREAMLET started singing seaward-ho!
  But found across the path its fancy planned
  A stone which stopped it with the stern command,
"Thus far and never farther shalt thou go."
Then, where the tiny stream was wont to flow,
  A shining lake appeared with silver strand,
  Refreshing flower-strewn fields on either hand—
Reflecting starry skies and sunset glow.
So oftentimes we find our progress stayed
  By stones that bar the steps we fain had trod,
    Whereat we murmur with a sense of wrong;
Unmindful that by means like this is made
  That sea of glass where stand the saints of God
    To sing the new and never-ending song.

No Room.

STRANGELY the wondrous story doth begin
  Of that which came to pass on Christmas Day—
  "The new-born babe within a manger lay
Because there was no room inside the inn."
No room for Him Who came to conquer sin
  And bid distress and mourning flee away!
  So in the stable He was fain to stay
Whilst revelry and riot reigned within.
And still the same old tale is told again:
  The world is full of greed and gain and glee,
    And has no room for God because of them.
Lord, though my heart be filled with joy or pain,
  Grant that it ne'er may find no room for Thee,
    Like that benighted inn at Bethlehem!

Easter.

THE women sought the tomb at dawn of day,
And as they went they wept and made their moan :
" His sepulchre is guarded by a stone,
And who for us shall roll the stone away ? "
But lo !—an Angel, robed in white array,
Had rent the rock and sat thereon alone.
" Fear not," said he ; " the Lord hath overthrown
The power of Death : I show you where He lay."
We echo oftentimes that cry of old :
Huge stumbling-blocks confront us whilst we wait
And wonder, weeping, who will help afford :
But as we question, sorrowing, behold !
The stone is rolled away, though it is great,
And on it sits the Angel of the Lord.

High and Lowly.

THE Syrians said, "Their God is of the hill,
And in high places He is wont to reign;
But let us fight with Israel on the plain,
And it will be our turn to smite and kill!"
So now again we cry, "The Lord doth fill
The heavens with the glory of His train;
But to earth's darkest depths of grief and pain
He stoops not, leaving sin to work its will!"
Still runs the answer, "Woe to them that see
In Me unrighteousness, nor understand
That high and lowly are of equal worth!
Both light and darkness are alike to Me:
The mountains' strength is Mine; and in My Hand
Are all the hidden corners of the earth."

In the Children's Hospital, Chelsea.

A LITTLE cripple once with puzzled head
Pondered on prodigals who waste their joys:
"If I could run about and make a noise,
I'd never go to sleep at all," he said.
Oh! happy children, who postpone with dread
The nightly putting-by of treats and toys,
Take pity on those helpless girls and boys
To whom, alas! 'tis always time for bed.
By gracious gifts and greetings strive to make
Their lingering bedtime seem less hard to bear,
Their lost to-morrow not so far away:
And pray that Somewhere, when no night can break
The daylight's spell, they too may have their share,
And make up all their long arrears of play.

14th January, 1892.

(The Death of H.R.H. the Duke of Clarence.)

MIRTH turns to mourning, and the marriage-lay
To bitter lamentation, all too soon:
The sun hath set although it still is noon,
The earth is darkened while it yet is day.
The fresh young year seems grimly old and grey
Ere the last quarter of its earliest moon:
The house of kings is desolate: the boon
Of life, like vapour, vanishes away.
In vain we question, "Why should these things be?"
We find no answer in the stormy sky
Nor in the mountains' everlasting bars,
Nor in the ceaseless sobbing of the sea:
Yet trust we dimly, as we look on high,
There is an answer hid beyond the stars.

10th May, 1893.

(*The Opening of the Imperial Institute.*)

THE sons of England shouted, "Let us raise
A princely palace, 'mid a people's cheers,
In memory of half a hundred years
Of queenly progress in all perfect ways!
And o'er its porch this pæan let us blaze:
'Tis England that is prime among her peers;
No powers nor principalities she fears;
To England therefore be perpetual praise!"
And England answered, "Do as ye have said;
That so their fathers' glory may be shown
To generations which come after you.
But rase your writing, and inscribe instead
The superscription of the Prophet's stone:
The Lord our God hath helped us hitherto."

Wulfruna's Hampton.

(*Wolverhampton.*)

NOW certain women carved their names in stone
That whosoever ran the same might read.
Cambridge was founded by Saint Etheldrede,
The holy daughter of an Anglian throne:
Saint Frideswide it was made Oxford known
By many a generous gift and godly deed:
Saint Hilda nobly helped Northumbria's need
When Whitby's abbey to full height had grown.
Wulfruna likewise chose the better part;
And in the midst of this our Mercian plain
A stately minster to God's glory raised,
To prove thereafter to the thronging mart
That favour is deceitful, beauty vain,
But she that fears her Maker shall be praised.

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